**The third dialogue partner: how do we experience modern western culture?**

**Time, space and the possibility of God**

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As Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah’s paper indicates, religious identity is a complex phenomenon and part of that complexity relates to the relationship between individuals and religious communities. If Elli’s paper has been more concerned with the benefits of modernity for many individuals, then this paper pays particular attention to the challenges of modern life experienced by some Christian faith communities. Christianity, like Judaism, is a richly diverse set of beliefs and practices that cannot be succinctly described let alone reduced to simple definition. Again like Judaism, part of the diversity in Christianity lies in a range of responses to modernity. Unlike Judaism, however, the tensions between conservative and progressive approaches to the challenge of modernity run through rather than between denominations. In relation to the churches deriving from the Reformation, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834) is often described as the ‘Pioneer of Modern Theology’[[1]](#footnote-1) because he was one of the first Protestant theologians to embrace the challenges posed to Christian faith by distinctively modern questions. He did this by developing a theology that put human experience centre stage, making religious experience the key to his theology. His was an approach that placed religion alongside other dimensions of human culture and theology alongside other forms of intellectual enquiry. The subsequent liberal theology that stands in the tradition established by Schleiermacher has been strongly rejected by others, most notably among Protestant theologians by Karl Barth. Barth’s abandonment of the 19th Century liberal theology he was taught in Berlin was influenced in part by the experience of the First World War and reinforced by his involvement with the Confessing Church’s opposition to Hitler. The Kingdom of God as encountered in what he referred to as the strange new world of the Bible was something very different to the modern belief in human progress embraced in liberal theology. Whilst the effects of modernity on Roman Catholic theology have been experienced differently, a similar tension between different approaches is seen in the Catholic modernist crisis of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with Alfred Loisy and George Tyrell being the key figures advocating an approach to scripture and doctrine that was open to the historical critical method inspired by modernity. Whilst still not uncontroversial, the Second Vatican Council can be seen as more measured opening of the Catholic Church to the needs and challenges of the modern world. What this means is that as well as the historical diversity of different Christian traditions – Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox - there is the further diversity generated by different responses to modernity leading to the dynamic that Elli speaks of in her paper.

Yet it is not only religious traditions that are both complex and multiple: cultures are too, and this is what makes the third dialogue partner as frustrating, elusive, inconsistent and stimulating as the other two. How to describe the times in which we live? Is it late modernity, high modernity or post modernity that we inhabit? Or should we rather speak of multiple modernities[[2]](#footnote-2) alongside the multiple Judaisms of which Elli speaks and the multiple Christianities to which I can equally attest? In fact it is even more complicated than this. Religious traditions and modernity are so intertwined that different conceptions of modernity are as much influenced by religion as *vice versa*. In a recent discussion within the context of the discourse of multiple modernities, Anthony Carroll has argued that modernity as understood by Weber was in fact a distinctively Protestant modernity and that a Catholic modernity would be described differently.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the light of this background there could be many ways of exploring the experience of modern western culture, as indeed of describing more precisely what is meant by this constellation of terms. I want to take a slightly different way into the question by starting with a poetic reflection on the experience of contemporary life. As is so often the case when faced with such challenging subjects, poets encapsulate what more analytical forms of prose can struggle to convey. Micheal O’Siadhail is an Irish poet who, in recent work on the experience of life today published as *Globe*, effectively conveys something of what modern western culture has become. The final sequence of *Globe* is called *Angel of Change* and begins with *Overview*:

Giddy world of shuffle and hotchpotch

Criss-cross planet of easy mix and match.

Keyboards tap a galaxy of satellites

And monies shift in nervous kilobytes

Across a grand bazaar of cyberspace.

Migrants roam our busy market-place.

Noise and anguish of an age. Free-range.

Freewheeling. Nothing endures but change.

Given a globe where borders leak and flow

A violin pleads beside a sitar and koto

As nightly starving Sudanese now stare

Out of the tube. And no hiding unaware

Or folding out again an old cocoon.

No turning back. We’ve reached the moon.

Adam, atom-splitter, rider in space.

Is this our earth’s frail and wispy face?[[4]](#footnote-4)

So much is expressed and evoked in these few lines, which in short span communicate so many dimensions of modern western culture as lived reality. What I want to take from them, though, are two themes that are central to contemporary experience: globalisation and speed, the related themes of space and time. Following an exploration of these two themes I will move to a related discussion of the possibility of God in modern western culture, an important question for religious communities.

Time

*Giddy world of shuffle and hotchpotch... Nothing endures but change...*

Fast food and instant credit, one-click ordering with next day delivery, instant communications and continual change: speed is one of the marked features of modern life, the 24/7 consumer culture of which Elli speaks. Some find this exhilarating, creating a world full of possibility, whilst others find it exhausting and challenging. But what effect does this have on religious life? How is this pace of life experienced by religious communities?

According to the central character of Yann Martel’s *Life of* *Pi* Christianity should be quite at home in this world of speed and movement:

Christianity is a religion in a rush. Look at the world created in seven days. Even on the symbolic level, that’s creation in a frenzy. To one born in a religion where the battle for a single soul can be a relay race run over many centuries, with innumerable generations passing along the baton, the quick resolution of Christianity has a dizzying effect. If Hinduism flows placidly like the Ganges, then Christianity bustles like Toronto at rush hour. It is a religion as swift as a swallow, as urgent as an ambulance. It turns on a dime, expresses itself in the instant. In a moment you are lost or saved. Christianity stretches back through the ages, but in essence it exists only at one time: right now.[[5]](#footnote-5)

It may appear this way from a Hindu perspective, but the relationship to time in Christianity is rather more complex than this suggests. There is the measured experience of the liturgical calendar with the annual cycle of festivals resonating with the seasons: no rush here as each moment of the Church’s year moves inevitably on to the next and then round the cycle again. But the very liturgical celebrations that mark this cyclical routine point to other relationships to time. There is the making present of past time in *anamnesis*, the remembrance that lies also at the heart of Passover; and there is the eschatological anticipation of future time. These last two – *anamnesis* and eschatology – are encountered particularly but not exclusively in the Eucharist. The Christian experience of time, liturgically mediated, is potentially a very rich one; but that richness is compromised by aspects of contemporary life. Both the modern mythology of progress, so undermined by catastrophic events of the 20th Century, and the present blurring of time through speed pose a challenge to the Christian relationship to time, particularly as expressed and experienced in worship.

At one level this challenge to the liturgically mediated experience of time is very straightforward. The Christian churches are finding that Sunday morning is no longer time culturally demarcated for worship and so the numbers gathering to experience liturgical time in its different aspects are decreasing. People are spending their time on other pursuits.

But the challenge goes deeper than this and can be seen as a theological issue. It is not just that new speeds of communication, travel and change have been made possible by technological advance and that this has had an impact on the way we live our lives. It is that; but it is more than that and concerns the nature of time in modernity, in which time comes to be seen as an undifferentiated linear progression lacking any sort of religious meaning, such as that provided by the Messianic ‘now time’ that Walter Benjamin describes,[[6]](#footnote-6) time in which ‘every second of time [is] the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.’[[7]](#footnote-7) Prior to modernity time was given meaning by a story of divine involvement in human history. Modernity called that religious narrative into question but still told a story that imbued time with meaning: the narrative of human progress. Postmodernity calls into question the very narratability of time and human history. As Scott Bader-Saye has it: ‘while modernity gave us a story without an author, postmodernity has given us a world without a story’, the effect on time being that ‘[l]ife is “just one damn thing after another”.’[[8]](#footnote-8) Or, referring again to Benjamin, he says that the ‘homogenous, empty time ushered in by the modern era continues to reign supreme, but now without the optimistic assumption that human beings could imprint order on its pristine sands. All moments become interchangeable.’[[9]](#footnote-9) Time, then, is practically and theologically problematic in modernity and postmodernity, however these are conceived. How might religious traditions respond?

One of the most striking responses to the contemporary challenge of time that I have encountered in fact comes from a Muslim writer. Hasan Askari is writing in the context of a dialogue about ultimate goals in faith traditions. He bears quoting at some length to convey the full force of his argument:

To utter the word God is to regather all the threads of the universe, and to return to its centre, the hidden peace and stability behind all discord and change. To believe in God is to reaffirm freedom from the finality of the world, and to reaffirm freedom is to again mistrust the medium of our existence, namely, *time*…

The modern city is the embodiment and artifice of pseudo-eternity. People within the city run on and on *panting* for time. It is like running a long race – the track is of course long, stable and continuous (just like time which is there, and will continue endlessly) but the runner constantly gasps for breath.

Alienation is exactly this breathlessness, panting and gasping for time, while freedom is the ability to run fast. The very thing man has supposedly conquered, recoils against him.

To utter the word God is to raze the edifice of pseudo-eternity to the ground, to declare again that man is free.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It is the pseudo-eternity of speed that can seem so inimical to religious life in the modern world. But not just religious life. As Askari implies, the freedom promised by the mastery of time through speed is oppressive to the experience of human being whether religious or not. It is simply that religious traditions offer a different account of the human relationship to time that becomes more difficult to appreciate against the background of this pseudo-eternity.

Something of this different experience of time is expressed very effectively in Christian terms by R S Thomas in *The Bright Field*,[[11]](#footnote-11) which likens the sun illuminating a field to the pearl of great price in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 13:45-6). It is worth everything to possess this pearl, described in terms of a present encounter with eternity shining through the brightness of the illuminated field. This almost sacramental encounter with eternity in the present moment is in stark contrast to the restless chasing after a future that never arrives or the nostalgic longing for a past that never was. The attention to the present moment in which eternity is encountered is not one that is encouraged by the emphasis on freedom through the mastery of speed. In the sense of eternity conveyed by R S Thomas, Yann Martel’s Pi is right to see Christianity as existing ‘right now’. But does the urgency of the ‘now’ mean being in a rush? Certainly not in the ‘now’ of *The Bright Field*. But there is another sense in which the ‘now’ of God’s liberating presence and purpose, as experienced in the Exodus tradition, compels to urgent action. The transformation… of Jewish-Christian relations over the past 60 years is a valuable example of such urgent action. Time that is seen as marked in some sense by providence offers a meaningful context for such action.[[12]](#footnote-12) When Jews and Christians meet together the painful past of enmity and persecution is present and awaits transformation by the experience of present and anticipation of future friendship. Meaning is given to time not by the triumph of one story over another but by the weaving together of different narratives into a story that marks time differently, redeeming lost time.

The relation to time in Christianity, then, is a complex one, from the eschatological intensity of the earliest period in which the return of Christ was expected imminently, through the fourth century reconciliation to time,[[13]](#footnote-13) to the changing experience of time in (late/post/high) modernity. The contemporary experience of time is one that some individuals and some faith communities find liberating, but that can equally present challenges for religious traditions shaped by very different understandings of time. The nature of the challenge, a challenge on which Jews and Christians may usefully reflect together, is further explicated by a discussion of the changing experience of place.

Place

*Criss-cross planet of easy mix and match... A violin pleads beside a sitar and koto*

The effects of globalisation on the places we inhabit are every bit as significant as the transformed experience of time. Place is important in different ways in Christianity and Judaism, from the land of Israel (the subject of future papers), through the shrines associated with Christian saints to the gathering places in use for worship today. Historically and still today some of these spaces are hotly contested either in terms of ownership or in terms of significance. But my questions about place are more to do with how our (religious) experience of place is being transformed in modern Western culture. For many today the geographical ‘community’ in which they live holds much less significance for their life and identity than it would have done even a generation ago. High streets are replicated around the country with fewer and fewer marks of distinctiveness, and shopping malls could often be anywhere in the world. There is a blurring of place as there is of time. The rise of the global village means that on one level everybody is everybody else’s neighbour, whilst on another level nobody is anybody’s neighbour anymore. Social networking connects us with people on the other side of the globe while those living a few doors away may remain strangers. As with the effects of our changing experience of time, so with the experience of place, the local church sometimes suffers from the declining significance of the local in the face of changing social patterns and the wider effects of globalisation.

Zygmunt Bauman has used the metaphor of ‘liquid’ to describe the current experience of modernity, speaking of a transition from modernity’s solid phase to a liquid phase which is particularly associated with the release of capital from ties to particular locations. Bauman’s conception of liquid modernity is a rich and nuanced sociological reading of the contemporary socio-economic context with many aspects to it. Not least of these is the affect on place, articulated in relation to the city. Bauman speaks of two lifeworlds inhabiting the same space of the contemporary city, creating a two-tier experience of city life today, with the urban elite being much less attached to the local:

The secession of the new elite (locally settled, but globally oriented and only loosely attached to its place of settlement) from its past engagement with the local populace, and the resulting spiritual/ communication gap between the living/ lived spaces of those who have seceded and those who have been left behind, are arguably the most seminal of the social, cultural and political departures associated with the passage from the ‘solid’ to the ‘liquid’ stage of modernity.[[14]](#footnote-14)

What this suggests is a problematization of the local in the experience of modern western culture today with many, particularly among the powerful, identifying more strongly with fluid networks than fixed local structures. One Christian response to this changed perception of place has been to embrace a liquid account of Church in which (virtual) networks are more important than the traditional liturgical practices of *gathering* together in one place at one time.[[15]](#footnote-15) Another response to the effects of globalisation on place, though, is very different. As some religious thinkers have been critical of the relationship with time that is engendered in modern western culture, seeing that culture as offering a pseudo-eternity, so within Christian theology there has been a critique of globalisation as distorting our experience of place.

William Cavanaugh argues that the liturgical practice of gathering the faithful together in one place stands as a challenge to what he calls the ‘false catholicity’ of globalisation.[[16]](#footnote-16) According to Cavanaugh’s critique, globalization ‘enacts a universal mapping of space typified by detachment from any particular localities.’[[17]](#footnote-17) This has a damaging effect on local communities and individuals, leading to fragmentation and the undermining of genuine Catholicity. His critique here is an extension of his critique of the modern nation state in which complex space is flattened and homogenised.[[18]](#footnote-18) In his account of this process the changing experience of place is related to the experience of time:

 Advances in the management of time have made possible the extension of the universal mapping of space to a global level. The speed with which information and people can travel across space has overcome spatial barriers and shrunk the dimensions of the world.[[19]](#footnote-19)

But the description of this using the homely language of ‘the global village’ masks the more negative effects of globalization which Cavanaugh describes as a detachment from the particularity of specific places which have to mould themselves to the requirements of global capital in order to compete.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Against the background of this assessment of the false catholicity of globalization, Cavanaugh draws out the significance of the Eucharist for understanding the significance of the local in contemporary Christian life. ‘The Church gathered in the catacombs’, he writes, ‘was as catholic as the Church that would ride Constantine’s chariots to the ends of the known world.’[[21]](#footnote-21) It is this emphasis on the catholicity of the gathered community that enables an overcoming of the tension between local and universal. This is where we see the contrast with the false catholicity of globalism because the ‘action of the Eucharist collapses spatial divisions not by sheer mobility but by gathering in the local assembly.’[[22]](#footnote-22) One of the notable features of this gathering in its earliest form is that it broke down social barriers and Cavanaugh concludes his book with an example of that same local expression of catholicity in operation in a contemporary context. Fr Rutilio Grande was killed by a death squad in El Salvador following a homily in which he preached on the Eucharist as ‘a communion of sisters and brothers that smashes and casts to earth every sort of barrier and prejudice and that one day will overcome hatred itself.’[[23]](#footnote-23) Archbishop Oscar Romero, against much opposition from the elite, declared that the only Mass to be celebrated in the Archdiocese that Sunday would be the funeral Mass, such that those from all social backgrounds would be gathered in one space. Cavanaugh concludes by noting in from this example

the power of the Eucharist to collapse the spatial barriers separating the rich and the poor, not by surveying the expanse of the Church and declaring it universal and united, but by gathering the faithful in one particular location around the altar.[[24]](#footnote-24)

There is here, a contemporary Christian theological critique of the effects of modernity on our experience of place with a liturgical and theological response. As with time, then, so with place, there is an ambivalent relationship between faith communities and modernity. Without denying the benefits brought by modernity, there are costs; and the diminishment of place is one such cost.

Against this background, what of Jewish-Christian relations? It strikes me as significant that the predecessor of the group producing this collection of papers was rooted in and named after a place, the ‘Manor House’ group. The book produced by that group notes the importance of that place in facilitating their gathering.[[25]](#footnote-25) Places have featured negatively in the previous history of Christian-Jewish relations: one need only think of the ghettos. Can we see the gathering of Jews and Christians in the same place as – at some level - redeeming the exclusionary places of past relations? At one level the work of this group could have been carried out virtually through the exchange and circulation of papers by e-mail. But as the place of meeting is important for each community, so is the place of inter-religious encounter. The significance of place for the group has been implicitly noted by our recognition of the importance of meeting in both Jewish and Christian spaces.

The possibility of God

In the background of our discussion of the contemporary experience of time and place from a religious perspective has been lurking the underlying question of the possibility of religious life today. The place of religious faith and practice in the contemporary context is a complex and contested question. But it is one that must be addressed in thinking about Jewish-Christian dialogue, especially where that dialogue is a theological one. What can we say about God in the context of religious pluralism? What can we say about God in a secular society? What can we say about God after the Shoah? Perhaps more fundamentally, *can* we speak of God outside of our faith communities today? And if we can, then what, in particular, can Jews and Christians talking *together* say about God in the modern, late modern or postmodern world?[[26]](#footnote-26) This final question is one that will be addressed in different ways in later papers. In order to set the context for these further reflections I will consider two approaches to the question of the current possibility of God-talk: the ‘post-secularism’ of Jürgen Habermas and the ‘anatheism’ of Richard Kearney.

The fact of Church decline, in terms of attendance and influence, has been explained in various ways: scientific advance and trends in intellectual history ultimately stemming from the Enlightenment; and social forces such as individualization and rationalization. However understood and explained, a consensus has been emerging that religion as a significant social force is at least on the wane, if not on the way out completely. Against this background the rise of fundamentalism and of various forms of (new-age or alternative) spirituality are seen either as the exceptions that prove the rule, or as facets of the processes of decline rather than evidence against them.[[27]](#footnote-27)

With the decline of traditional religious practice being such an accepted fact of life, some form of secularization thesis is at least implicitly taken for granted by religious and non-religious alike. The tide, however, may be turning. In 2001 Jürgen Habermas, a leading secular philosopher, was awarded the annual peace prize at the Frankfurt Book Fair. In his acceptance speech he generated some surprise by arguing that secular societies needed to engage in dialogue with religious believers. In the decade following that statement he has come to be one of the most influential exponents of the view that we are entering a post-secular society and of the important contribution that religious believers can make to the wider public conversation.

When he speaks in terms of a post-secular society it is important to be clear what he does and does not mean. He continues to recognize the effects of a process referred to as ‘the functional differentiation of social systems’ whereby ‘churches and other religious organizations lose their control over law, politics, public welfare, education and science’.[[28]](#footnote-28) This in turn leads to a withdrawal of religion into the personal domain and a growing individualism in religious practice, something which can be experienced positively for personal religious identity as Elli’s paper argues, as well as challenging collective religious identity. So Habermas is not rejecting the secularization thesis in its entirety. But he is recognizing that the impact of this in terms of the decline of religious influence has not proceeded as anticipated.

One of Habermas’s most important contributions to this debate comes in an article on religion in the public sphere,[[29]](#footnote-29) although his dialogue with Pope Benedict may be more well known.[[30]](#footnote-30) In the former he notes the surprising turn of events that seem to buck the trend of declining religious significance and argues that religion must be taken more seriously in the public conversation. In this context he engages another significant philosophical voice, that of John Rawls who in his later work argued that religious reasons could be introduced in public debate with the proviso that they were subsequently translated into the language of public reason, meaning a reason that all can accept. Habermas pushes the translation proviso further by saying that the burden of translation doesn’t just fall on those using the religious arguments but on those using secular reason, thus setting up an important conversation between secular and religious thought. He begins to develop this conversation in his dialogue with Pope Benedict and continues it in his dialogue with philosophers from the Jesuit School for Philosophy in Munich, published under the suggestive title of *An awareness of what is missing*.[[31]](#footnote-31) Here he articulates not only the allowability but the *necessity* of religious reason in the public conversation. So to answer one of my earlier questions: according to Habermas God-talk is not only possible but desirable. He speaks here of ‘post-secular society’s awareness of the unexhausted force of religious traditions.’[[32]](#footnote-32) It is only as the postmetaphysical thinking associated with modernity (secular reason) comes to terms with this unexhausted force of religious thought that modern reason can overcome ‘the defeatism lurking within it.’[[33]](#footnote-33) In this way, theological thinking comes to be seen as important for his central project of reclaiming the possibilities of reason against its postmodern detractors.

The fact that such an influential philosopher not only observes but embraces the abiding significance of religious thought, despite not being religious himself, suggests that this particular aspect of the experience of modern western culture is undergoing significant change. A notable feature of Habermas’s understanding of the post-secular context is the important place of dialogue in negotiating a pathway through it. As with time and space, there is the potential for a distinctive Christian-Jewish approach to the possibility of God in a context described as post-secular.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Some other contours of what that approach might look like are sketched out in recent work by Richard Kearney and his advocacy of what he describes as *anatheism*, or ‘returning to God after God’.[[35]](#footnote-35) Bewailing the dominance of equally uncritical religious fundamentalism and aggressive atheism Kearney offers a third way of a dialogue between the religious and the secular, the questioning believer and the open-minded agnostic or tentative atheist. He seeks to create a space for hospitality instead of hostility as the response to the stranger, and it is a space that is populated by artists, philosophers and religious believers as well as being a space that can be experienced in daily life. The philosophical tradition that Kearney draws on for this work, that of French postmodern thought, is one that has Christian and Jewish influence at its heart: the Christianity of Ricoeur, the Judaism of Levinas and the Jewish influence on some of Derrida’s thinking.

Here too, in Kearney’s *anatheism*, is an awareness of what is missing, a divine absence that needs to be acknowledged. What is particularly significant about this is the place of inter-religious encounter in that acknowledgement. I use the word ‘encounter’ rather than ‘dialogue’ at this point for a reason. It is about something more fundamental than talking together: it is about how we respond to the stranger who disrupts our world and calls us into question. Inter-religious encounter is a particularly significant context for such meetings with strangeness and we can respond with hostility or hospitality. Jewish-Christian dialogue is a hospitable response and one which, therefore, creates an important place for the returning to God after God of which Kearney speaks.

For Kearney, though, this possibility of return is not just found in religion and he traces the renewed possibility of God as a phenomenon in 20th Century literature, thus rooting anatheism in the space between religion and modern western culture. The ‘return of the sacred’ that Kearney also describes in terms of ‘sacramental aesthetics’ is illustrated through the work of Joyce, Proust and Woolf who ‘epitomize… a sacramental imagination that celebrates the bread and wine of everyday existence.’[[36]](#footnote-36)

A particularly significant feature of this example of a post-secular turn is that it complements some of the critique of modernity earlier in this paper. In offering that critique I have not wanted to cast modernity in wholly negative terms from a Christian perspective. As Elli attests, there are many positive features of modernity, not least the ability of individuals to forge their own religious identities freed from oppressive religious authority. Kearney’s work is evidence of the rich literary tradition in modern western culture, one in which such identities can be explored and celebrated. It is also evidence of a greater openness to the possibility of God in the postmodern world and, therefore, of a more hospitable environment for religious belief and practice.

Time, place and the possibility of God

In this paper I have tried to explore the experience of modern western culture by looking at the contemporary experience of time and place from a Christian and inter-religious perspective and then by considering the post-secular, post-atheist turn in which there seem to be new possibilities for religious thought opening up in the public sphere. Modernity has issued, and continues to issue, a range of challenges to religious life and thought, and different Jews and different Christians have responded variously to these challenges. Modern western culture is neither good nor bad: it is where we live and we engage with it critically and collaboratively from within. Inter-religious dialogue in general and Jewish-Christian dialogue in particular is an important contributor to that engagement.

Taking seriously the challenges of modernity, I argue that there is a time and a place in which the possibility of God is at its most tangible. This is the time and place of dialogue in which Jews and Christians inhabit a particularly significant space where the remembered past and the anticipated future are present. The gathering of Christians and Jews in one place *as* Christians and Jews has been central to the work of the Council of Christians and Jews in the seventy plus years of its existence. In such gatherings the participants are not simply a group of individual citizens who happen to be Jewish and Christian; but nor are they defined purely by their collective identities as Jews and Christians. They are not standing together *against* modernity, but neither do they embrace modern western culture uncritically. They model a way of being together that is precisely the third alternative advocated by Habermas between the communitarian identity politics of the radical multiculturalists on the one hand and the difference-blind assimilation of the hard-line secularists on the other.[[37]](#footnote-37) Instead of these options Habermas advocates ‘complementary learning processes’[[38]](#footnote-38) between religious and secular. In Jewish-Christian dialogue we learn, model and develop such approaches to mutual learning, and not just between our religious traditions, because the debate between religious and secular runs through our traditions and is not something external to them. Following Kearney I have suggested that it is in such hospitable and dialogical approaches towards other traditions of faith and life that we discover the possibility of God in modern western culture. This has been my own experience: the challenges to the possibility of belief today have been most effectively addressed not by apologetics and argument, but by dialogue with those of other faith and those of none. The possibility of faith and religious life today, then, is an inter-religious possibility which is critically and creatively rooted in its particular modern context.

1. Keith W. Clements, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (London: Collins, 1987) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. S. N. Eisenstadt, ‘Multiple Modernities’ in *Daedalus;* Winter 2000; 129, 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Anthony J. Carroll *Protestant Modernity: Weber, Secularization, and Protestantism* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Micheal O’Siadhail, *Globe* (Bloodaxe Books, 2007), p.92 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002), p.57 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For further discussion of this see Scott Bader-Saye ‘Figuring Time: Providence and Politics’ in Randi Rashkover and C. C. Pecknold eds. *Liturgy, Time, and the Politics of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), p.93. In his discussion, Bader-Saye draws on Walter Benjamin’s discussion of Messianic time. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Walter Benjamin *Illuminations* (New York: Shocken Books, ), p.263 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bader-Saye ‘Figuring Time’, p.94 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bader-Saye ‘Figuring Time’, p.95 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hasan Askari ‘Unity and Alienation in Islam’ in Stanley Samartha ed. *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals: Salvation and World Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974), pp.54-55 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. R S Thomas ‘The Bright Field’ in *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.114 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This is the burden of many of the papers in Randi Rashkover and C. C. Pecknold eds. *Liturgy, Time, and the Politics of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. ‘As the church came to feel at home in the world, so she became reconciled to *time*.’ Dom Gregory Dix *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), p.305 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Zygmunt Bauman *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007) pp. 78-79 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Pete Ward *Liquid Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. William T Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (T & T Clark, 2002) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination*, p.98 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination*, p.99*ff* The changing relation to space is articulated in dialogue with Michel de Certeau’s distinction between itineraries describing particular routes through local places and maps which ‘survey a bounded territory from a sovereign centre’ (p.101). The effect on space is described using the now familiar description of McDonaldization (p.105). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination*, p.105 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination*, pp.106*ff* [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination*, p.112 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination*, p.113 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination*, p.122 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Cavanaugh *Theopolitical Imagination*, p.122 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Tony Bayfield and Marcus Braybrooke (eds.) *Dialogue with a Difference: The Manor House Group Experience* (London: SCM, 1992), pp.vii-viii [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. There is not space in this paper for a detailed discussion of the different ways of describing our relationship to modernity today, but it is important to acknowledge that this is a contested topic. Habermas, who is discussed below, defends modernity as an unfinished project but describes the current experience of modernity as ‘modernization threatening to spin out of control’ in his ‘An Awareness of What is Missing’, Jürgen Habermas et al. *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.18 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Steve Bruce *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) for a sustained defense of the secularization hypothesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Jürgen Habermas ‘Notes on Post-Secular Society’ *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25.4 (2008), 17-29, p.19 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Habermas, Jürgen ‘Religion in the Public Sphere’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 14.1 (2006), 1-25 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See note 26 for full reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Jürgen Habermas ‘An Awareness of What is Missing’, p.18 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Jürgen Habermas ‘An Awareness of What is Missing’, p.18 This is a reference to his ongoing debate with postmodern philosophy (Derrida, Foucault et al) in which he sees reason undermining itself: this is the intellectual aspect of ‘modernization threatening to spin out of control’ that I quoted in footnote 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The inter-religious practice of Scriptural Reasoning is a significant example of the sort of dialogue that has the potential to generate such insights. See the paper by David Ford. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Richard Kearney *Anatheism: returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Kearney *Anatheism*, pp.101-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Habermas ‘Notes on Post-Secular Society’, pp.24-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Habermas ‘Notes on Post-Secular Society’, p.27 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)